

# Pretender to the Throne? R. C. Evans and the Problem of Presidential Succession in the Reorganization

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BORN INTO A POOR CANADIAN FAMILY living in St. Andrews, Ontario Province, on 20 October 1861, Richard C. Evans rose to fame and power experienced by few other members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> In this process he spent over forty years in the leadership of the Reorganization, working for two church presidents, Joseph Smith III (1832-1914) and Frederick M. Smith (1872-1946), as a seventy, apostle, member of the First Presidency, and bishop of Canada. Yet he left the Reorganization in 1918 over a complex set of issues that reflected the problems of both his own consuming ambition and the unusual administrative and procedural policies in the Reorganized Church's method of choosing its leaders.<sup>2</sup> Evans struck out on his own, denounced the Reorganized Church and its leader, and founded his own church organization. His dissent represented an important episode in the development of both the Reorganized Church and the Mormon dissenting tradition.

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1. Basic information on the life of R. C. Evans can be found in Roger D. Launius, "R. C. Evans: Boy Orator of the Reorganization," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 3 (1983): 40-50; Roy A. Cheville, *They Made a Difference* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1970), 258-67; F. Henry Edwards, *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1973), 5:605-607; W. Grant McMurray, "His Reward is Sure": The Search for R. C. Evans," *Restoration Trail Forum* 11 (May 1985): 5-6.

2. The current succession of W. Grant McMurray to the Reorganized Church's presidency, the first non-Smith to hold the office, points up the importance of this earlier controversy.

A large number of studies has explored the nature of dissent and schism in twentieth century religion. They suggest that dissent may arise from any one or a combination of four factors. First, dissent and schism have often been fostered by underlying social, cultural, economic, and other disparities among groups. In this environment differences among groups in an institution are reflected ideologically and lead to conflict as each group seeks to win approval for its conceptions. Second, dissent might be engendered when members perceive that they lack meaningful involvement in setting doctrines, administering organization, and participating in leadership capacities. Third, conflict may result when certain people, beliefs, rituals, and myths are defined as heretical from the standpoint of religious authority. Finally, some dissent might be accidental, unintentioned on the part of the dissenter but defined as such by church leadership.<sup>3</sup> Charisma, of course, due to its volatile nature, has always been a potent source of dissent and schism.<sup>4</sup>

The dissent of R. C. Evans from the Reorganized Church in 1918 was a combination of several of these factors. Intensely charismatic, highly capable, and exceptionally ambitious, Evans was stymied in his personal and professional goals by a system that did not, from his perspective, recognize and reward his talents. His personality was viewed as obnoxious and his actions were interpreted as heretical by other Reorganization leaders, especially President Frederick M. Smith who saw him as a rival. The sociocultural and political differences between Evans and his supporters in Canada and the American church under Smith also fostered dissent. Evans's complaints about church policy and doctrine also in-

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3. These reasons have been advanced by numerous students of sociology. Sociocultural differences have been emphasized in the writings of Gus Tuberville, "Religious Schism in the Methodist Church: A Sociological Analysis of the Pine Grove Case," *Rural Sociology* 14 (1949): 29-39; Christopher Dawson, "What About Heretics: An Analysis of the Causes of Schism," *Commonweal* 36 (1942): 513-17; Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflicts and Social Movements* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973); and H. Richard Neibuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1929). James S. Coleman, "Social Cleavage and Religious Conflict," *Journal of Social Issues* 12 (1956): 44-56; William Gamson, *Power and Discontent* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1968); and Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987) stress a lack of participation, power, or influence as determinative of dissent. The primacy of intellectual or ideological reasons for dissent have been accentuated by Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Dissent in American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); John Wilson, "The Sociology of Schism," *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* (London, Eng.: SCM Press, 1971), 4:1-21; and Mary Lou Steed, "Church Schism and Secession: A Necessary Sequence?" *Review of Religious Research* 27 (1986): 344-55. For a discussion of dissent in the context of Mormonism, see Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, eds., *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

4. On this subject, see S.N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building: Selected Papers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), and Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

served an intellectual component into the conflict. All of these came together to create a rift in the Reorganization that was both significant and irreconcilable.

The seeds of Evans's dissent were planted early in his life. Evans was not raised a Latter Day Saint, and his conversion probably fueled his zeal to preach to others about his belief in the Restoration. When Evans was fourteen years old, his father attended one of the church's periodic missionary series in Toronto and joined the Reorganization, but at the time no other members of the family seemed to care about religion. Evans's conversion came two years later while attending a series of meetings held by J. J. Cornish, a Canadian convert to the Reorganized Church who was revered as one of the great missionaries of the movement. Evans was so taken by his preaching that on the last night of the series he asked Cornish for baptism.<sup>5</sup> His mother, who had also been attending these meetings, decided on baptism a few days later. The two went together into a frozen river on 5 November 1876 and joined the Reorganized Church.<sup>6</sup>

Evans was an especially precocious youth who used his natural abilities to advantage in his church service. He studied the scriptures, Latter Day Saint history, and skills that would make him an outstanding minister. He was especially moved, he later wrote, by the experiences of the youthful Joseph Smith, Jr., and also came to respect the courage and forthrightness of the early leaders of the Reorganization, all of whom at one point or another in their careers had dissented from the larger Mormon movement to strike out on their own spiritual course. Evans freely admitted that he held men such as Jason W. Briggs, Zenos H. Gurley, Sr., and Joseph Smith III as heroes whom he wished to emulate.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, Evans began early to hone his oratory skills and to develop a system for effectively preaching the Reorganization's gospel. By the time he was twenty years old, he was preaching vigorously and serving in a variety of leadership capacities in the local Reorganized Church district. Because of his commitments and capabilities, Evans quickly drew the attention of Apostle John H. Lake, the institutional leader in charge of the missionary program in Canada. Evans was the type of man he needed to work in the expanding Canadian missionfield of the 1880s and he put him to work. In 1886 Lake ordained Evans a seventy and sent him into the field as a general church appointee minister. He was not yet

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5. R. C. Evans, *Autobiography of Elder R.C. Evans, One of the First Presidency of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (London, Ont.: n.p., 1907), 6-9; John J. Cornish, *Into the Latter-day Light: An Autobiography* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1929), 59; Alvin Knisley, *Biographical Dictionary of the Latter Day Saints Ministry from the Rise of the Church to 1948* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1948), n.p.

6. Evans, *Autobiography*, 35-41.

7. Cheville, *They Made a Difference*, 259-65.

twenty-five years old.

Evans did not disappoint. No one, not even the greatly respected J. J. Cornish, was more effective than R. C. Evans in the preaching arena. For instance, Evans developed to its highest form in the Reorganized Church the art of missionary revivals.<sup>8</sup> He gave considerable attention to the special techniques of obtaining an audience for his services. He used sophisticated, at least for his time and church organization, newspaper advertising, handbills, door-to-door invitations, and even sandwich boards worn by willing supporters to promote his preaching series. For his time and circumstances, Evans was as effective at drumming up an audience as any revivalist on the circuit.<sup>9</sup> Were he a late-twentieth-century minister, Evans would have employed radio and television to reach his audiences.

While the advertising campaign might have brought people to the first meeting, Evans kept them coming back with his riveting homiletics. Night after night his powerful preaching persuaded his audience. Evans typically wore a tuxedo at his presentations, after opening hymns and prayer he would walk briskly onto stage, so briskly some have remembered his coattails flapping behind him. He always spoke without notes, making it possible for him to dispense with a podium of any type. He marched around the stage, speaking all the while, using flailing arm motions and other body language to make his points. He always asked his audience to write on slips of paper any questions they had and place them in baskets used in the offertory. At various points in his sermons he would walk over to the baskets and draw questions which he would then answer off the cuff. He had a masterful command of the scriptures and a tremendously charismatic personality which shone in these settings. By the end of his series Evans had convinced many listeners of the Reorganization's claims, and he always ended his preaching with an offer to baptize anyone who desired in what could only be compared to an evangelical Protestant altar call. Many converts to the Reorganization

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8. Examples of his sermons can be found in R. C. Evans, "Baptism is Immersion," *Saints' Herald* 36 (19 Oct. 1889): 684-86, 36 (26 Oct. 1889): 704-706, 36 (2 Nov. 1889): 719-22; "Lecture by Elder R. C. Evans," *Saints' Herald* 39 (9 July 1892): 447-49; R. C. Evans, "Ideas of Hell. As Taught by Both Catholic and Protestant Ministries. Also a Few Thoughts on Probation, Foreordination, and Unconditional Election," *Autumn Leaves* 6 (July 1893): 297-301; R. C. Evans, "The Mother of Harlots and Her Daughter: A Picture as Painted by the Artistic Brush of the Historians now Reposing in My Library," *Saints' Herald* 49 (9 Apr. 1902): 334-37, 49 (16 Apr. 1902): 356-59; R. C. Evans, "What Shall I Do with Jesus?" *Saints' Herald* 49 (3 Dec. 1902): 1172-77; R. C. Evans, "The Eleventh Hour Dispensation," *Saints' Herald* 51 (20 Jan. 1904): 53-59; R. C. Evans, "An Examination of 'Campbellism'," *Saints' Herald* 51 (25 May 1904): 478-84, 51 (1 June 1904): 484-508.

9. Edwards, *History of the Reorganized Church*, 5:606-607.

came from these missionary services in Canada.<sup>10</sup>

In a small church like the Reorganization, it was natural that such a gifted preacher would come to the attention of ecclesiastical officials. John Lake had recognized his talents very early and ensured that Evans received the proper encouragement and advancement in the Canadian missionfield. The Saints in the region also showered him with attention and praise. Joseph Smith III, RLDS president, began to follow Evans's activities at least by the mid-1880s and in 1897 called him to the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, when he was only thirty-six years old. Evans's ordination to the Twelve extended his ministry beyond Canada for the first time. Again he impressed those with whom he came in contact.<sup>11</sup> Joseph Smith III initiated a special friendship with Evans during this period, in part because Evans introduced Smith to Ada Rachel Clark whom he married in 1898 after having been a widower for a little over a year. Evans performed the wedding ceremony for the couple in January 1898.<sup>12</sup> Gradually, Smith came to think of Evans as almost another son.

By all standards Evans acquitted himself well in the public ministry required of an apostle. His devotion to the church was probably at least as great as other stalwart members, and his abilities as a preacher were unparalleled in the Reorganization. When it came time to reorganize the First Presidency in 1902, Evans was a logical choice to serve Smith, now a man of seventy years, as one of two counselors. To accomplish this purpose Smith gave a revelation to the church during the April 1902 general conference that called Evans as one of his counselors, and he ordained him on 20 April 1902. Smith also called into the presidency the heir apparent to the prophetic office, Frederick Madison Smith, his oldest son.<sup>13</sup>

As a member of the First Presidency, Evans's widened stage and administrative responsibilities allowed even more church members to meet him. Evans impressed all with his public speaking gifts, and he apparently enjoyed the resulting praise. It appears, however, that he never

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10. Interview with Larry W. Windland, 15 Sept. 1991, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Some of Evans's published sermons have been collected and show something of his unique preaching style. See R. C. Evans, *The Songs, Poems, Notes and Correspondence of Bishop R. C. Evans, and Some Addresses Presented to Him, from Many Parts of the World* (London, Ont.: n.p., 1918).

11. Evans, *Autobiography*, 166-67; "The Canadian Press on President Smith's Visit," *Saints' Herald* 44 (27 Oct. 1897): 677-79; "The Editor Abroad," *Saints' Herald* 44 (10 Nov. 1897): 709-11; *London (Ontario) News*, 8 Oct. 1897.

12. For a fuller discussion of this episode, see Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 333-35.

13. Book of Doctrine and Covenants (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1970 ed.), Sec. 126. Biographical information on Frederick M. Smith can be obtained in two fine studies: Larry E. Hunt, *F. M. Smith: Saint as Reformer* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1982), 2 vols.; and Paul M. Edwards, *The Chief: An Administrative Biography of Frederick Madison Smith* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1988).

fully controlled his ego. As the years passed and Evans's fame and power grew, he came increasingly to see himself as superior to those around him. Evans's ego was a two-edged sword. His need for aggrandizement pushed him to excel so that his ego would be fed by praise from others. The praise for his successes also created the need for more praise. It was a cycle. In balance it was a healthy dynamic, out of balance it degenerated into egomania. Increasingly, as the years passed, the ego in Evans turned into a monster that fed on public approval and grew increasingly dysfunctional.<sup>14</sup>

Very early Evans began to demand public approval and boasted of his successes to those around him. One such demonstration of this came in 1888 when Evans wrote to presiding bishop George A. Blakeslee bragging that he did not need to draw travel and living expenses from the church treasury as did other full-time appointee ministers. He was held in such high esteem by the Saints, he said, that they gladly contributed to his welfare on their own. "You will observe," he pointed out to the bishop, "I have not had to draw one cent from your agent, for my own expenses since April [1887] conference."<sup>15</sup>

Little signs of conceit gave way to larger displays of egotism, and church officials worried that Evans might become so vain that his success as a minister might be impaired. Joseph Smith III expressed his concern when writing to Evans's wife in May 1896, asking her to help R. C. maintain a proper perspective. She told Evans about the prophet's concern. In irritation he wrote a sharp reply to Smith explaining that he fully understood his limitations and that there should be no fear of his acquiring what Smith had called a "bighead." Smith wrote back a long, fatherly letter explaining his concern. He said, "My intent was only to put you on your guard against the insidious approach of self-esteem degenerated into pride." He added:

Pride is the most potent factor toward a useful man's overthrow, ever used by the adversary; hence my anxiety to see you free from even the appearance of personal vanity—even in well doing. Hence my charge to Sr. Lizzie, that if she saw you endangered by the flattery of the unwise, kind-hearted saints, she might by wifely regard and counsel help you.

The prophet went on to suggest that all men, including himself, suffered from egotism at times, but that all should work to overcome it. "I know that few men are so constituted so as to withstand the encomium of their

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14. For a discussion of such issues, see Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

15. Evans to George A. Blakeslee, 22 May 1888, R. C. Evans Biographical File, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri.

followers lavishly bestowed," Smith added. He then told Evans: "And, there is awakement of danger in your natural makeup; that is, you like to stand well with your friends and incidentally with others; especially men of note. You are not necessarily jealous because others shine, or please, but you like to please." Smith closed with this advice: "Do not permit the praise of your followers to make you vain is the injuncture, in better expression. And I know that so long as you keep in mind the sources where all strength and truth comes, you will not. For this I pray for you and myself."<sup>16</sup>

Because of Evans's talents as a speaker and administrator, as well as his popularity, Reorganized Church officials overlooked his egotistic excesses most of the time. There can be no doubt, however, that Evans was easy to dislike and that he irritated his fellow appointees repeatedly. Some of that was motivated by jealousy, for Evans was beloved by the Saints, was exceptionally gifted, and had the ear of Joseph Smith III, but much of it was brought on by Evans's own sense of self-importance and other problems that circulated around him. He was haughty and proud when the strictures of the church called for leaders to be humble and self-effacing. It was an especially difficult role for him and his failure to contain his sense of self-importance created many small irritations among the other members of the church's leading quorums.<sup>17</sup>

Gradually, these egotistical tendencies began to outgrow his ability to control them. He boasted in 1919 about how he had done so much for the Reorganization:

I have been honored by the Latter Day Saint Church as no other minister of the church has been honored. No man living ... has ever preached more than three sermons at a General Conference. Many have not preached one, but for years they have selected me to preach from fifteen to twenty-one sermons, during the conference. Every night R. C. was on the platform. Every fence announced my subject. New bills were out every day telling what R.C. was going to say at night. Did they ever do that with any other man? Never.

Evans's message was clear: he had been insufficiently appreciated for all of this excellent work.<sup>18</sup>

Evans's egotism led to actions that created additional difficulties between himself and other church officials. These took a variety of forms. He began to view himself as different from others, the normal rules did not apply to him, and with that decision, whether conscious or not, he

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16. Smith to Evans, 22 May 1896, Joseph Smith III Letterbook #6, 486-87, Reorganized Church Library-Archives.

17. Some of these specifics have been discussed in Launius, "R. C. Evans," 42-43.

18. T. W. Williams, "A Darkened Mind," *Saints' Herald* 66 (6 Mar. 1919): 318.

created additional ill-will. Evans, for example, had constant scrapes with church leaders over contributions. There is a well-known story still told in Evans's hometown of Toronto of how he had extra deep pockets sewn into all of his trousers to hold money given to him by admiring followers. Whether that money was for his personal use or for the benefit of the church was a sore point on numerous occasions. Evans said that it had been contributed to him personally and not as part of an offertory in a service. There were also charges of impropriety with women. None of these complaints, however, could be substantiated to Joseph Smith III's satisfaction and no action was taken against Evans until after 1905.<sup>19</sup>

Besides these incidents contributing to animosity between Evans and other church leaders, one larger problem surfaced after 1900 that in time led to the orator's estrangement from the Reorganization. It arose over the nature and practice of succession in the church's presidency. When Evans entered the First Presidency in 1902, there is evidence to believe that he thought it possible that he might one day aspire to the prophetic office because of his many talents, his longstanding service in the church, and his close relationship with Joseph Smith III. The Reorganization had long held the belief that the prophet chose his successor through revelation, and that there were no formal restrictions on who that might be.<sup>20</sup> Smith told the Reorganized Church membership at the time of his ordination, for instance, that some had suggested that the presidency "came by right of lineage, yet I know that if I attempted to lead as a prophet by these considerations, and not by a call from Heaven, men would not be led to believe who do not believe now."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, while most members recognized that lineal succession could take place, they also understood that nothing in church law excluded others from obtaining the presidency. Evans reasoned that such a restriction would be humanity's attempt to limit God and, consequently, saw no reason to refuse the office should he be called into it upon the death of the elderly Joseph Smith III. Smith fueled this conception with statements such as that offered in an 1894 general conference Resolution, "the President [of the Church] is pri-

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19. Interview with Larry W. Windland, 15 Sept. 1991; Cheville, *They Made a Difference*, 263-64; Williams, "Darkened Mind," 318; R. C. Evans, *Why I Left the Latter Day Saint Church: Reasons by Bishop R.C. Evans* (Toronto, Ont.: n.p., 1918), 52.

20. Book of Doctrine and Covenants, 43:2; Russell F. Ralston, *Fundamental Differences* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1963), 14-75; Aleah G. Koury, *The Truth and the Evidence* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1965).

21. "The Mormon Conference," *True Latter Day Saints' Herald* 1 (Apr. 1860): 103. See also "Testimony of Joseph Smith," in *Complainant's Abstract of Pleading and Evidence in the Circuit Court of the United States, Western District of Missouri, Western Division, at Kansas City, Missouri* (Lamoni, IA: Herald Publishing House, 1893), 79-80.



marily appointed by revelation."<sup>22</sup>

Although convinced that his successor should be chosen by revelation, Joseph III was also convinced that God would call his son. Such a position had a longstanding tradition in the movement. An 1835 revelation to Joseph Smith, Jr., proclaimed lineal priesthood: "The order of this priesthood was confirmed to be handed down from father to son, and rightly belongs to the literal descendants of the chosen see, to whom the promises were made."<sup>23</sup> In 1841 he announced another revelation making a direct statement about the favored position of his own descendants: "In thee and in thy seed shall the kindred of the earth be blessed."<sup>24</sup>

These beliefs came together in an 1897 revelation which called the sons of key leaders into priesthood offices. It dictated:

The sons of my servant the President of the church, the sons of my servant William W. Blair, whom I have taken to myself, the sons of my servant the Bishop of the church, and the sons of my servants of the leading quorums of the church are admonished, that upon their fathers is laid a great and onerous burden, and they are called to engage in a great work, which shall bring them honor and glory, or shame, ... These sons of my servants are called, and if faithful shall in time be chosen to places whence their fathers shall fall, or fail, or be removed by honorable release before the Lord and the church.<sup>25</sup>

This enabled the immediate ordination of Frederick M. Smith and several other leaders' sons to the office of elder, much to the chagrin of some longstanding members of the movement. Joseph R. Lambert, an apostle at that time, offered some pertinent comments about Frederick's call. He questioned his ordination on the grounds that Frederick "had not been an active worker in the church."<sup>26</sup> Evans, who had ambitions of his own, wrote about this issue in 1918. He remarked that there had been no evidence of divinity in the younger Smith's priesthood call and "said ordination [was] contrary to the law. ... But, to say the least, this young man was ordained to the Melchisedec priesthood, the order said to be after the order of Son of God, without a call, being the prophet's son, he won out as against the protest of the Apostle."<sup>27</sup>

22. *Rules and Resolutions* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1964 ed.), Res. 386.

23. Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Sec. 104:18.

24. *Ibid.*, 107:18c.

25. *Ibid.*, 124:7.

26. "Conference Minutes: Decatur District," *Saints' Herald* 44 (23 June 1897): 401-402.

27. R. C. Evans, *Forty Years in the Mormon Church: Why I Left It* (Shreveport, LA: Lambert Book House, 1976 ed.), 77. Admittedly, this book was written several years after Evans had publicly broken with the Reorganized Church, but it seems likely that he was always bitter over this action.

In 1902, at the same time that Evans entered the First Presidency, Frederick M. Smith did so too, and it was clear that Joseph III considered this a primary move toward his eventual succession. But the president sent mixed signals to Evans and the rest of the Reorganization. He told the general conference of 1902:

I have been importuned to settle the question as to who should be my successor. We have advanced upon the hypothesis of lineal priesthood in this regard, and while I believe in it, I believe it is connected with fitness and propriety, and no son of mine will be entitled to follow me as my successor, unless at the time he is chosen he is found to be worthy in character, ... for he should be called to serve in the church who has proved himself to be worthy of confidence and trust.<sup>28</sup>

Smith, therefore, left open the possibility that his son might not be found worthy and that another could be called. Evans always recognized this possibility.

In spite of this, during the rest of Smith's life he increasingly relied on Frederick Smith for counsel, and as his father's health failed Frederick increasingly ran the church's bureaucracy. The younger Smith began presiding at general conferences and quorum meetings, attending to routine administrative matters, and handling most of the church's publishing decisions. The first evidence of this came in 1903 when Joseph Smith III requested that Evans accompany him on a missionary trip to the British Isles. Evans misread this action as a sign of favoritism and a recognition that he would receive the nod as successor.<sup>29</sup> What he failed to understand was that Smith left his son at home to run the church, a sure sign of the prophet's faith in Frederick's abilities and an indication of how the succession issue would be settled. During this lengthy trip Frederick took over daily control of the reins of church government. At the 1906 general conference, furthermore, Smith left no doubt that his son would succeed him by using his revelatory authority. Smith directed: "in case of the removal of my servant now presiding over the church by death or transgression, my servant Frederick M. Smith, if he remain faithful and steadfast, should be chosen, in accordance with the revelations which have been hitherto given to the church concerning the priesthood."<sup>30</sup>

While Evans made no public comments about the younger Smith's designation at the time, he clearly resented it. Frederick had been little more than a schoolboy before 1903, pursuing graduate studies at the University of Missouri and leaving many of the presidency's duties in

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28. Quoted in Edwards, *History of the Reorganized Church*, 5:558.

29. This is discussed in detail in Launius, "R. C. Evans," 43.

30. Book of Doctrine and Covenants, 128:8.

Evans's hands. Evans believed that the prophet's poor choice was attributable to family ties alone. He wrote later, "I had a thousand times more experience in church work, for I had been ordained and labored for years as a Priest, Seventy, and an Apostle."<sup>31</sup> Evans even considered resigning from the presidency and taking another position in the hierarchy. He planted the seed for this action in 1907 when he suggested to Frederick M. Smith that he had experienced a dream in which he should be released from the First Presidency and ordained as bishop of Canada.<sup>32</sup> When Evans talked to Joseph Smith III, however, he reported that the prophet "wept over me and begged me not to insist, to wait till the Lord would speak."<sup>33</sup> Nothing came of this proposal for another two years.

Evans's ambition was trapped in a bureaucratic structure that denied the possibility of acquiring the top position to all except a select few, and all avenues of entry into that group were blocked regardless of how committed and talented anyone might be. For all the church's comments about revelatory calling, no one but a member of the Smith family, and then only those in the direct line, have ever entered the prophetic office. Even as late as 1996, when W. Grant McMurray became the Reorganized Church president, no one but a member of the Smith family had ever ascended to that office. In an environment where a royal family controls power so thoroughly as this, such men as Evans could never be satisfied. It was and continues to be a very undemocratic method of operation that ensures that capable, committed, and ambitious people will be cast aside and ultimately frustrated. Whether the church would have been better for taking a different approach toward succession is debatable, but obviously the 1906 designation of Frederick Smith embittered Evans and set him on a course which led him in later years to withdraw from the church.

Instead of outright resignation, the chagrined Evans returned to Canada and halted much of his ministerial work, confining his religious endeavors to preaching at local meetings in Toronto. He became a dissenter, if not outright, at least in a thousand small ways. While working locally, he spent part of his time writing letters and building his personal following, possibly with the intention of engineering a popular movement among the Saints for his succession to the presidency. A notable example was the publication of an image-enhancing autobiography heroically describing his religious exploits. The book, Evans hoped, would boost his following in the church, although he recognized that some would see it as a bald-faced attempt at self-aggrandizement. He defused this criticism

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31. Evans, *Forty Years in the Mormon Church*, 137.

32. Evans to Smith, 20 May 1907, Evans Papers.

33. Evans, *Why I Left the Latter Day Saint Church*, 42; Evans to Frederick M. Smith, 20 May 1907, 24 June 1915, 5 Jan. 1918, Evans Papers.

in advance, explaining that he wrote the book only "because the people in and out of the church have requested ... a history of MY LIFE."<sup>34</sup>

In addition, Evans used his preaching services in Toronto to further his image among the public. In 1904 he inaugurated an impressive series of winter meetings in the 2,500-seat Majestic Theatre. He used his well-organized advertising campaign to make the meetings his most successful ever and decided to make the series an annual event.<sup>35</sup> After Evans's estrangement from the church, however, he used the meetings more and more as a personal forum for his dissenting church views. Evans left the impression that he opposed many church policies and that he wanted to change several aspects of church functioning.<sup>36</sup>

Increasingly, after it became clear that Evans was not on the best of terms with church leaders, his old rivals and enemies emerged to take advantage of his fall from grace. They saw an opportunity to strip the egotistical Evans of his position and influence in the Reorganization hierarchy. These bureaucratic games of chance took a variety of forms and were relatively unimportant, except those efforts sponsored by the Quorum of Twelve Apostles. Some of Evans's rivals saw an opportunity to chastise the First Presidency for overstepping its jurisdictional authority about administrative control at the local level, while also punishing Evans for real and perceived abuses of power and position.

The issue came to a boil in 1907 when the Twelve suggested that Evans, while serving as chief Reorganization officer in Canada, conducted his duties in a capricious and improper manner. They asserted that his administrative records were poor and questioned his use of church funds.<sup>37</sup> More important, however, and a throwback to the problems that had been present over the management of local jurisdictions, was Evans's continuing service as director of the missionary program in Canada. He had held this responsibility as a member of the Quorum of Twelve before 1902, but when he entered the First Presidency, he continued to serve in this capacity. Joseph Smith III had left him in charge of the region in spite of an agreement that had been reached in the early 1890s which allowed the Twelve only to preside over missionary activities in the church's regional jurisdictions. This had been done as a compromise to remove the Twelve from the administrative management of organized

34. Evans, *Autobiography*, 270.

35. *Ibid.*, 224-25; "Bro. Evans in Toronto," *Saints' Herald* 53 (28 Feb. 1906): 195-96; Evans to E. L. Kelley, 28 Nov. 1910, Evans Papers.

36. Evans to E. L. Kelley, 9 Mar. 1911, Evans Papers; Cheville, *They Made a Difference*, 261-62.

37. Evans to E. L. Kelley, 21 Jan., 18 Nov. 1907, 5 Jan., 6 Jan., 28 Apr., 6 June, 19 Oct. 1908, all in Evans Papers.

jurisdictions.<sup>38</sup>

The Quorum of Twelve met on 5 April 1907 to consider this issue and prepare a written statement condemning the continued assignment of R. C. Evans as minister in charge of Canada. They cited supporting evidence on organizational structure, especially a key phrase from an 1875 resolution—"It is the duty of the Twelve to take charge of all important missions"—and concluded that "all missions should be under the active oversight of the members of the Quorum of Twelve or members of the Quorums of Seventies by the Quorum of Twelve."<sup>39</sup> It was payback time, to both the First Presidency and Evans, and the Twelve moved swiftly to gain the membership's acceptance of their position.

The effort to embarrass Evans backfired. Joseph Smith III, who might have been more sympathetic, believed that in criticizing Evans, the Twelve was also questioning his own authority. He moved quickly to defeat the apostles' efforts.<sup>40</sup> This controversy set the stage for the most extensive analysis of relationships among the presiding quorums ever conducted in the Reorganized Church. In addressing this issue, Smith completely removed Evans from consideration. The result was a document, "The Right of the Presidency to Preside," prepared by the members of the First Presidency and presented to a Joint Council of the Presidency and the Twelve on 18 April 1907. It was an involved document, explaining the First Presidency's position on governing revelations, resolutions, and other pronouncements on relations among the First Presidency, the Twelve, and other ruling quorums.<sup>41</sup> Following the reading of the document, the Joint Council discussed it briefly and then the First Presidency withdrew from the meeting. Discussions among apostles led to the approval of Evans as missionary in charge of Canada for another year and deferral of the status of "The Right of the Presidency to Preside" until the 1908 council meetings.

In the ensuing year Smith marshaled supporters for a showdown with the Twelve. The apostles did the same. Smith did not question the motives of the apostles in this controversy, although he should have done

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38. See Maurice L. Draper, "Apostolic Ministry in the Reorganization," in Maurice L. Draper and Clare D. Vlahos, eds., *Restoration Studies I* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1980), 219-31; Joseph Smith III, "Pleasant Chat," *True Latter Day Saints' Herald* 9 (1 May 1866): 129-30; F. Henry Edwards, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1967 ed.), 411-12; Quorum of Twelve Minutes, 1865-1928, 4 Apr. 1890, Reorganized Church Library-Archives; Joseph Smith III, William H. Kelley, and E. L. Kelley, "Epistle of the Council," *Saints' Herald* 44 (21 July 1897): 257, as quoted in Edwards, *History of the Reorganized Church*, 5:403-406.

39. First Presidency Minutes, 5 Apr. 1907, 180-81, Reorganized Church Library-Archives.

40. *Ibid.*, 9 Apr. 1907, 190-91.

41. Joseph Smith III, "A Letter of Instruction," *Saints' Herald* 59 (13 Mar. 1912): 241-48.

so, for many of their efforts were not aimed at reaching a just decision but at punishing Evans. On 16 March 1908 the Twelve issued a detailed critique of "The Right of the Presidency to Preside" which nipped at many of its points. The apostles reported:

We are desirous of reaching an amicable solution of any apparent differences existing between us, and if there be none we see no reason why there should be a continuation of official jealousy, or latent fear that the Quorum of the Presidency is seeking to subvert the rights and privileges of their coworkers in the quorums. We concur in the idea that there are legitimate bounds to the duties, rights, prerogatives, and privileges of the quorum of the presidency. We desire to act in our office and calling in harmony with the Quorum of Twelve, the Seventy, and all other quorums of the church, more especially with the Twelve and Seventy, for the reason that these hold in some respects concurrent jurisdiction, and a serious antagonism between them must inevitably work to the injury of the cause.<sup>42</sup>

Apostolic ascendancy could not be thwarted with these words, however, and the Twelve resolved that "henceforth all missions be placed under the presidency of one of more members of the Quorum of the Twelve, or the Seventy," rather than under anyone, especially Evans, in the First Presidency.<sup>43</sup>

The issue might have ended this way except that in 1909 the Twelve again complained about Evans and Smith made a bold move. By revelation Smith honorably released Evans from the First Presidency, appointing his nephew, Elbert A. Smith, in his place. Smith wrote:

The voice of the Spirit to me is: Under conditions which have occurred it is no longer wise that my servant R. C. Evans be continued as counselor in the Presidency; therefore it is expedient that he be released from his responsibility and other be chosen to the office. He has been earnest and faithful in service and his reward is sure.

Smith had followed up on the suggestion Evans had made two years earlier about ordaining him bishop of Canada. Evans made sure that this possibility was brought to Smith's attention again before the 1909 general conference. He told Frederick Smith that "I believe God has called me to do the Bishop work and that he had blessed me along that line."<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, Evans received new administrative duties on the day of his release from the First Presidency. Smith ordained him a bishop and assigned him to Canada. With one swift move, buttressed by the author-

42. This material is in the First Presidency Minutes, 16 Mar., 26 Mar. 1908.

43. Quoted in Edwards, *History of the Reorganized Church*, 6:266-67.

44. Evans to Smith, 22 Feb. 1909, Evans Papers.

ity of revelation—perhaps cooked up to reassert authority, as has also been done both before and since—Smith resolved the matter by moving Evans outside the First Presidency and into a significant and just as unnerving position as Evans had been lobbying for during the previous two years.<sup>45</sup> The action essentially established a semi-autonomous church in Canada and placed Evans at its head. If he could not govern the entire Reorganization, perhaps he could lead the Canadian church. With the protection of the Union Jack, Evans could now establish for most purposes independence from the larger U.S.-based movement.

From his headquarters in Toronto, Evans began to exercise greater control over the Canadian national organization. For the rest of his life Joseph Smith III tried to breach the chasm separating Evans from the rest of the church's leadership, but without success.<sup>46</sup> Smith wrote to him in July 1909 that he thought Evans had what amounted to a persecution complex: "It almost seems to me while thinking about it, that this 'enemies' idea has grown upon you, until it is an obsession; and that it poisons nearly everything you say or write in reference to that which some of them [apostles] have had to do."<sup>47</sup> He refused to carry out the duties of the bishopric as dictated from church headquarters in Independence, Missouri, and many people complained of his aloofness from the "advice and support" of other officials. Evans's conduct in Canada after 1909 was akin to a medieval vassal rebelling against his lord.<sup>48</sup>

Increasingly after being set up in a semi-autonomous position in Canada, Evans had little contact with the church's hierarchy except for Joseph Smith III, who also had his share of troubles with the wayward bishop. In February 1910 Smith wrote to Evans: "I really feel sorry for you Brother Richard, that you have grown too peculiarly sensitive, that if you meet a remark in a letter or hear of one from somebody that you do not clearly understand, you are apt to put an unfortunate meaning to it."<sup>49</sup> Smith added in December, "Pardon my blindness, I cannot see how you can preach so fervently about the efficacy of kind words and kind deeds as I have heard you do, and the peace destroying character of saying unkind things and using harsh words" and still act so mean toward others.<sup>50</sup> A year later Smith wrote in exasperation, "Under the circumstances surrounding our correspondence for the last year and one-half, or two years, I feel considerable diffidence in writing you, as I hardly know

45. Book of Doctrine and Covenants, 129:1.

46. Smith to Evans, 26 Apr. 1909, Evans Papers.

47. Smith to Evans, 12 July 1909, Evans Papers.

48. "The Work in Toronto," *Saints' Herald* 57 (2 Feb. 1910): 125-26; Evans to Joseph Smith III, 16 July 1909; Evans to E. L. Kelley, 7 Oct. 1909, 12 Jan. 1915, all in Evans Papers.

49. Smith to Evans, 15 Feb. 1910, Evans Papers.

50. Smith to Evans, 7 Dec. 1910, Evans Papers.

at what point I may give offense. It is a painful condition for me. I wish it were otherwise."<sup>51</sup> After this Smith apparently gave up trying to win Evans back into the church's fold until he was about to die. For his part, Evans continued to ignore church headquarters and to do what he wanted in Canada. He complained about continued persecution of him by other church officials. At the same time his egotism and obnoxiousness made him an easy person to dislike. All of these concerns fed on each other and created an especially difficult environment in which church officials had to operate.<sup>52</sup>

A significant incident relating to this touchy situation took place in December 1914 as Joseph Smith III lay on his deathbed in Independence, Missouri, and asked Evans to visit him before he died. Evans came immediately and spent an afternoon with Joseph. It was a closed session and no one knows what they said. Perhaps Smith took one last opportunity to counsel Evans about his ego, which appeared in odd ways and on unfortunate occasions, and to defuse Evans's obvious irritation about the direction of the church.<sup>53</sup> Clearly, in spite of their disagreements, Evans still respected the old Reorganization prophet. Smith apparently also still felt great affection for Evans—perhaps the special affection a father feels for an erratic son—but there is every reason to surmise that Smith wanted to help Evans understand and agree with church policy.

When Joseph Smith III died on 10 December 1914, the last vestiges of loyalty Evans felt toward the church hierarchy died with him. Smith had kept the hostility between his son and Evans from coming to the surface. Now that safety valve was gone, and a feud between the two soon began to take up much of their time. Evans was jealous of Frederick's power and authority as the successor; he thought Smith received the position solely because of his lineage. Smith thought Evans a pompous egotist who did not understand the burdens faced in church leadership and who bucked legally-constituted authority. Letters between the two demonstrate the hostility each felt. For instance, Smith wrote to Evans in January 1915 complaining about rumors Evans had spread about the new prophet's lack of qualifications. He challenged Evans's assessment that he possessed no credentials more impressive than being "only a Smith."<sup>54</sup>

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51. Smith to Evans, 17 May 1911, Evans Papers.

52. Evans to E. L. Kelley, 28 Nov. 1910, 9 Mar. 1911; Evans to Joseph Smith III, 6 Nov. 1912, 12 Jan. 1915; Evans to Frederick M. Smith, 10 Dec., 28 Dec. 1914; Evans to Elbert A. Smith, 15 Dec. 1914, all in Evans Papers.

53. R. C. Evans, "My Acquaintance with Pres. Joseph Smith, At Home and Abroad," *Saints' Herald* 57 (6 Apr. 1910): 356-59; Evans, *Songs, Poems, Notes and Correspondence of Bishop R. C. Evans*, 23, 125; Joseph Smith III to Evans, 12 July 1909, 15 Feb. 1910, 17 May 1911; Evans to Joseph Smith III, 6 Nov. 1912; Evans to Elbert A. Smith, 15 Dec. 1914; Evans to Frederick M. Smith, 10 Dec. 1914, all in Evans Papers.

54. Smith to Evans, 24 Jan. 1915, Evans Papers.



Much of the controversy was personal, extending back over years of disagreement, and not motivated by anything more significant than ambition and dislike. While Evans was certainly motivated by personal concerns, he also seems to have been directed by conscience and concern for the higher ideals of the movement. He complained, for instance, about the undemocratic method of succession that brought Frederick to the presidency in spite of other leaders' qualifications. This was partly self-serving, but Evans had a valid complaint. After Frederick became president in his own right, Evans began publicly challenging what he considered the growing authoritarianism of the Reorganized Church's leadership. Frederick's autocracy, Evans thought, was becoming increasingly repressive and required opposition. Evans also complained repeatedly of Smith's "espionage" on his activities. Smith responded to such charges by writing to Evans in 1917: "I resent the imputation that our office is the lodging place of the fruits of any spy or spies."<sup>55</sup> "Since his advent to that high station," Evans recalled, Frederick M. Smith "has been the chief cause of changing much of the church rules. Rule after rule has been changed to give him almost absolute power over everything in the church, Sunday School Religion, Ladies' Auxiliary, and he had the first and last word in the appointment of every office in the church."<sup>56</sup>

Evans even argued that since becoming president Smith had methodically and subversively maneuvered the affairs of the church with the intention of assuming dictatorial power. He presented what could only be called a declaration of war against Smith early in 1918:

I may be super sensitive, I may be hot headed. If so I am sorry, but when I think of the way I have submitted to injustice in the years ago, and crushed my feelings and kept my mouth closed, lest I would hurt the work I love, and have given forty years to buildup, I think I have both hurt myself and the church in so mildly submitting to the wrongs imposed, and in so doing both the church and myself have suffered.

He promised to do all in his power to ensure that perceived wrongs would not go unchallenged.<sup>57</sup>

Evans became so convinced of this latent authoritarianism that he formally listed forty incidents where Frederick Smith had exercised control outside his proper jurisdiction. Most of these dealt with the appointment or removal of general church officers. One instance cited by Evans was the passage of a General Conference Resolution in 1917 granting the president of the church power to pronounce administrative silences over

55. Smith to Evans, 12 Feb. 1917, Evans Papers.

56. Evans, *Forty Years in the Mormon Church*, 79.

57. Evans to Smith, 5 Jan. 1918, Evans Papers.

any priesthood member without the right of review by a church court. Evans opposed the measure with the argument that it gave Smith the absolute power to stop the priesthood functioning of anyone without benefit of trial. It was, he claimed, a violation of liberty every bit as great as the suspension of *habeas corpus*.<sup>58</sup>

Evans's complaints were not without foundation. There was a greater degree of control from above in the Reorganized Church during Frederick Smith's presidency than earlier. Joseph Smith III had sensed a latent authoritarianism in his son and on his death bed had warned Frederick about it. On 29 November 1914 he called Frederick into his chamber to offer him advice about church administration. Taking his son's hand, Joseph asked him to exercise patience in his relationship with the church members. "Be steadfast and if the people are heady, if the church is heady, the eldership are heady and take the reins in their hands as they have done a little especially on the rules and regulations, rules of representation," he told Frederick, "don't worry, let it pass, let the church take the consequences and they will after a while grow out of it. ... It is better that way than to undertake to force them or coerce. That would be bad trouble."<sup>59</sup> It seems probable that Joseph III recognized the potential for trouble in his son's personality.

In hindsight Evans's arguments, while they may have been somewhat self-serving, foreshadowed the turbulence in the Reorganized Church during the "Supreme Directional Control" controversy of the 1920s. This was a serious rebellion by some members of the church's leading quorums against overburdening control from Frederick Smith which resulted in the withdrawal from the movement of approximately one-third of active members.<sup>60</sup> Evans was also right that certain people in Toronto watched his activities and reported them to Smith.<sup>61</sup> Against this backdrop, Evans was not so much an egotistical crank as a forward-looking prophet of disaster.

The difficulties between Evans and the Reorganization hierarchy reached a climax not long after the April 1918 conference when Smith an-

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58. "General Conference," *Saints' Herald* 64 (18 Apr. 1917): 365; Evans, *Why I Left the Latter Day Saint Church*, 40-42.

59. Joseph Smith III's Last Remarks to his Family, 29 Nov. 1914, Joseph Smith III Papers, Reorganized Church Library-Archives; "Statement of President Joseph Smith to his Son, Frederick M. Smith, Sunday, November 29, 1914," *Zion's Ensign* 26 (11 Feb. 1914): 1.

60. The "Supreme Directional Control" crisis has been analyzed in Paul M. Edwards, "Theocratic-Democracy: Philosopher-King in the Reorganization," in F. Mark McKiernan, Alma R. Blair, and Paul M. Edwards, eds., *The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1973), 341-57; Hunt, *F. M. Smith*, 254-65; Edwards, *Chief*, 153-96.

61. See, for example, the large series of letters from James A. Wilson to Frederick M. Smith, beginning 15 June 1917 and ending 22 April 1918, Evans Papers.

nounced that he and some colleagues were going to Toronto to investigate allegations of misconduct against Evans. Just after Smith and his retinue arrived in Toronto, Evans announced that he would not allow anyone to poke into his business. He asked Smith for a letter granting completely autonomous status to a Canadian church under Evans's leadership.<sup>62</sup> Smith refused to discuss the issue with Evans, but after a series of smaller altercations Smith allowed Evans on 2 June 1918 to give his side of the story: "He spoke for more than an hour, making a bitter attack on the church and particularly on some of the leading officials, and displayed such a bitterness and antagonism, that only one course was left for the [visiting] committee, and that was to place him under official silence."<sup>63</sup> Thus Evans fell victim to the 1917 resolution he had opposed.

The next day Evans presented a letter of resignation to the church, commenting that it was necessary "because I can no longer endorse many of your rulings and the many changes you have caused to be made in the faith and practice of the church."<sup>64</sup> A few days later Smith formally accepted this withdrawal during a business meeting at the Toronto church. During these proceedings several of Evans's supporters, and he had many in Toronto, tried to introduce resolutions to readmit him, who was present, or to allow the branch to secede from the Reorganization. When Smith declared these resolutions out of order, Evans walked out of the meeting, followed by about 200 local Latter Day Saints. They met at a nearby house where Evans declared the necessity of a new church that would correct the apostasy of the Reorganization. Reports of numbers and commitment vary, but Evans was popular and drew a large following into his newly formed Church of the Christian Brotherhood from among the Ontario Saints.<sup>65</sup>

While Evans ventured into the new church claiming to be a dissenter seeking to purify the church, he quickly rejected some of the cherished principles of the Reorganization and moved more toward the mainstream of American Christianity. He attacked not just the abuses that he had complained about in the presidency of Frederick M. Smith but also the very foundations of the Latter Day Saint movement. He published two major works that could only be called exposés—*Forty Years in the Mormon Church* and *Why I Left the Latter Day Saint Church*—which de-

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62. Evans, *Why I Left the Latter Day Saint Church*, 45-48; Evans to Smith, 22 Apr., 13 May, 17 May 1918; Evans to Benjamin R. McGuire, 22 Mar., 10 June, 13 June 1918, all in Evans Papers.

63. Frederick M. Smith, "R. C. Evans Leaves the Church," *Saints' Herald* 65 (19 June 1918): 589.

64. Evans, *Why I Left the Latter Day Saint Church*, 50-51; Evans to Frederick M. Smith, 3 June 1918; Smith to Evans, both in Evans Papers.

65. Smith, "R. C. Evans Leaves the Church," 605; Walter W. Smith, ed., *Purported Angelic Visitation to R. C. Evans* (Independence, MO: n.p., 1918).

tailed his reasons for withdrawal. Evans wrote in these of the great hoax of Mormonism, of how he had been duped into it and only later, after much study and prayer, did he perceive its essential "evils." He commented that only after coming into contact with the writings of Edward M. Tullidge, a rebel Mormon historian of the late nineteenth century, did he begin to question the church. At the same time, Evans was not fully truthful in offering Tullidge's work as the source of his questioning. He had studied the church's history and doctrine for years, and had debated with other ministers over its viability. It seems impossible that he could have been unaware until the 1910s of Tullidge's work, especially since one of the historian's books had been published by the Reorganized Church in 1880.<sup>66</sup>

More likely, Evans was following the well-tested tradition of Mormonism by former members writing exposés. From John C. Bennett to Sonia Johnson, many ex-Mormons have found it therapeutic and lucrative to write horror stories about their former religion.<sup>67</sup> Evans's two books possess the necessary hyperbole and tenor to fit well into this genre. The reasons why he took this route can only be surmised. He probably thought he could gain greater acceptance for himself and his church in the non-Mormon religious community. He could possibly court sympathy from those same religious groups because of the "ordeal" he had suffered. Outsiders might perceive him as an upstanding person who, as soon as he realized all the bad things many thought about Mormonism were true, left the movement for more orthodox religious pursuits. Most important, the real reasons Evans left the Reorganization were probably not dramatic enough to elicit much public support and Evans chose not to emphasize them. In the end, and this was apparently something Evans did not want to admit, his administrative entanglements with Frederick Smith led not just to Evans's rejection of the church as a legitimate institution but of the entire framework of the Latter Day Saint faith.<sup>68</sup>

Evans was never the same after leaving the church. The Reorganiza-

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66. McMurray, "His Reward is Sure," 6; Edward W. Tullidge, *The Life of Joseph the Prophet* (Plano, IL: Herald Publishing House, 1880); Wayne Ham, "Truth Affirmed, Error Denied: The Great Debates of the Early Reorganization," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 7 (1987): 3-11.

67. Many of these books were published in the nineteenth century. As examples, see John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints, or an Expose of Joe Smith and the Mormons* (Boston: Leland and Whiting, 1844); and Fanny Stenhouse, *Tell It All: The Story of a Life's Experience in Mormonism* (Hartford, CT: D. Worthington and Co., 1874).

68. Stan L. Albrecht et al., "Religious Leave-Taking: Disengagement and Disaffection Among Mormons," in David G. Bromley, ed., *Falling from the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1988), 62-80, argues that doctrine plays little part in individual decisions to leave Mormonism, but it is often the most discussed reason.

tion hierarchy sparred with him during the remaining three years of his life, even taking him to court over alleged misappropriation of church funds, but these disagreements served no useful purpose other than to build solidarity within the institution against Evans and to exact revenge. The church was judged to be sound, the dissenter was defective. This process served as a defense mechanism for members and especially for the hierarchy.<sup>69</sup> Evans continued to hold his dynamic preaching series and to build a following in Toronto. Many of his followers were not ready to reject Mormon ideals, especially when Evans announced that he had spurned the Book of Mormon, and soon drifted off. He was also concerned about the individual rights of members, it should be mentioned, and his organization made it difficult for priesthood licenses to be taken away and for leaders to engage in arbitrary actions like those Evans believed he had suffered. When Evans died suddenly of pneumonia on 18 January 1921, it was a shock to those who knew him in Toronto. Most of the Reorganized Church, however, looked upon the death as a divine retribution for the recent misspent years.<sup>70</sup>

R. C. Evans was a complex person who cannot easily be placed into any particular category. In one sense, he was an ecclesiastical leader who desired some of the right things for mixed reasons. In another, he was an ambitious egotist who alienated those who had any real association with him. In yet another, he was a talented preacher and committed church leader who was squeezed out of positions which he could and perhaps should have filled. This talented, egotistical, ebullient, elegant, and erratic man enriched, infuriated, and challenged the Reorganized Church by his presence. It felt his loss keenly. Evans did not live to see some of his complaints about Smith's leadership expressed by others during the 1920s, but his spiritual presence was there nonetheless. Evans was a person whose ambitions and needs extended beyond what the faith, doctrine, and community would tolerate, but one who served as a precursor of impending conflict. His dissent was motivated by a complex process within specific sociocultural and historical contexts. Evans's dissent cannot be understood apart from the personalities and interrelationships of the time, yet those same personalities and interrelationships cannot be understood apart from Evans's legitimate dissent over church policy and doctrine.

Ironically, Evans lived a century too soon to achieve the full measure of his ambition in the church. Had he been a member of the First Presi-

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69. Gordon D. Pollock, "In Search for Security: The Mormons and the Kingdom of God on Earth, 1830-1844," 292-93, Ph.D. diss., Queen's University, 1977.

70. Elbert A. Smith, "The Death of R. C. Evans," *Saints' Herald* 68 (26 Jan. 1921): 76; "Vision Related by I. N. Wight, Talk with Richard C. Evans in the Spirit World," 23 Dec. 1921, Evans Biographical File.

dency in the early 1990s, there is little doubt that his capabilities would have realized his succession to the presidency. As it is, W. Grant McMurray—another talented, ambitious, ebullient, elegant, and erratic man—became the first non-member of the Smith family to lead the Reorganized Church in April 1996. Would Evans have been a good choice as president in 1914? No one knows. Will McMurray be a good choice at the end of the century and millennium? We will soon find out.